

Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year C: Year of Luke

“The Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland once more recommend this resource for the prayerful reading of the word of God. The 2008 Synod of Bishops in Rome had as its theme the word of God and *Lectio Divina* was recognised, described and recommended as an important expression of the Church’s love of Sacred Scripture (see the Message to the People of God, 9). The Bishops are grateful to the Scottish Bible Society and all those who have worked to produce this volume based on the readings for Year C of the Lectionary.”

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Scotland



These *Lectio Divina* outlines are also available in Albanian, Dutch, French, Greek, Maltese, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and other languages.

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“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Good News Bible





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Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year C: Luke

INTRODUCTION

These weekly outlines combine the Liturgy's Sunday Gospel readings with the *lectio divina* approach to Holy Scripture.

Lectio divina is a dynamic, life-oriented approach to reading Holy Scriptures encouraged by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. It provides a framework for a faithful and respectful reading of the Bible that is sincere and authentic.

Lectio divina is a blessing for the entire Church as it opens up the rich truths of Scripture for every Christian. Through it believers are invited to read, understand and deepen their appreciation of the Scriptures and to seek guidance for their lives in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Our real goal is to meet our Lord as we read his Word and allow him to transform our lives to be more like him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

All the information necessary for you to have a meaningful encounter with God's Word is included in this booklet. These outlines can be used individually or in groups.

The following pages introduce the four steps of *lectio divina* with some extra tips for using these outlines in groups.



ABOUT LECTIO DIVINA

History

Lectio divina dates back to the early Church Fathers around 300 AD. The four steps were first recorded by a monk, Guigo Cartujo, in 1173. These steps Lectio (Reading), Meditatio (Meditation), Oratio (Prayer) and Contemplatio (Contemplation) remain central today although methods differ.

Overview

In essence *lectio divina* is a simple way to meet with the Lord through reflection and prayer based on Holy Scripture. It is not a study method. Background knowledge can be helpful but is not essential.

Used in groups a structure is necessary but for individuals the steps need not be followed rigidly. Our aim is meeting God, not just completing the steps themselves. So when the Lord impresses something on us we need to stop and wait. We can always come back to the steps another time. We don't want to lose what God is saying to us.

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LECTIO – READING

Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows and cannot be rushed. So begin with a prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to ‘lead you into all the truth’ (John 16:13).

Read the passage slowly and carefully. Avoid being tempted to look at the Lectio comments or any of the other steps at this stage.

Have a notebook and pencil ready. Underline, or make a note of, any words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down any questions that occur to you. Read the passage several times and read it aloud. Give yourself time to understand and appreciate what is being said.

Now read the Lectio comments and reflect on the ways they are similar or different to your first thoughts.

MEDITATIO – MEDITATION

Meditation deepens our appreciation of the passage and helps us to explore its riches. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living...’ So approach Scripture in faith expecting God to speak to you. He may reveal something of himself to you. He might highlight an attitude or behaviour of yours that needs to change. He might show you a promise to encourage and strengthen you.

Here are some suggested approaches you may find helpful.

Use your imagination. Picture the passage; put yourself into the scene and become part of the story. See things through the eyes of the other characters, listen to what they say, watch their reactions, imagine how they feel. Keep coming back to Jesus. Get to know him; delight yourself and become fascinated by him, his words, his actions, the way he responds – everything about him.

Ask questions. Use your own questions and the questions given to think more deeply about the passage and what God wants to say to you. Ask Jesus why he did and said what he did. Try to understand his reasons and intentions. Allow time to be quiet, to listen and hear his answer.

Let the Word be a mirror for you. As we read the Bible it shows us more of what the Christian life looks like and where ours needs to change. We see how God’s Word applies to our daily life, as an individual, and as part of our community and society. We will find promises and encouragement, challenges and demands. If we are willing God will nurture and free us to be more fully human and fully alive.

PORATIO – PRAYER

Prayer opens up a conversation between God and us. In the Psalms we see how the writers pour out their feelings to God, often mixing hopes and fears side by side. God values our honesty. We can’t hide anything from him anyway. Using the words of the responsorial psalm can help us but we can also use our own words to have a heart-to-heart conversation with a very special friend.

Through prayer we make our response to the light God’s Word has shed on how we are living our lives. Now we can bring what is happening in our own life and in our community before God. We speak and listen, listen and reflect – it is a conversation with God.

CONTEMPLATIO – CONTEMPLATION:

To help us interpret the Gospel reading the Liturgy provides two further Scripture readings. Reflecting on these can both enrich our understanding of the text and bring into focus a response we may need to make to the Lord.

Contemplation gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with God. Be still before God and invite him in. Few words, if any, are necessary here. Enjoy time in his presence. Just be with him and let him love you. Let him refresh your soul.

Review

After you have finished your time of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation you may want to jot down in a notebook any experiences or thoughts that particularly impressed you. You may find it helpful to look back at these later.



USING THESE OUTLINES IN GROUPS

When *lectio divina* is used in a group a little preparation is needed.

LECTIO:

Try one or more of the following ways of reading the passage. See what works best for your particular group.

Individual reading. To start with give everyone time to read through the passage silently.

Proclamation of the Word. One person reads (proclaims) the Word. This is the traditional manner of reading in the liturgical celebration.

Two readers. Two people read the text aloud alternately.

Each person reads a verse. This is a way of involving each participant, inviting each to read from his own Bible, so that the reading is attentive and dynamic.

Audio version. If you have access to a recorded version of the text you could also use that. You may notice different words are stressed.

With different characters. Approach the text somewhat like a drama, in which one person is the narrator/reader, another takes the part of Jesus, a third takes another character. This can be the most dynamic or engaging method and helps us to identify just what the different characters in the passage are saying.

MEDITATIO:

- In the group setting, it is important that everyone is given time to participate, to share what the Lord has been saying to them. While the Lord speaks through his Word, he also speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. So as we listen to others we need to open our hearts to hear the Lord's voice speaking through them.
- It is important that everyone in the group understands that this sharing is to build one another up and enrich our experience. It is not necessary that everyone agrees about what is shared. You need to be careful to avoid this time turning into a debate or argument. The Lord knows us each as individuals so will have different things to say to us personally at this specific point in our lives.
- You can start with a simple question like "What catches your attention in this passage?" and use the printed questions. The aim is to help everyone feel comfortable to speak and share how the text has inspired them. Gently keep the group focused on the text and what God is saying.

PORATIO:

We suggest you give people time for personal silent prayer before God. You can also give opportunity for people to pray out loud in their own words and use verses from the responsorial prayer. The aim should be to help each person make a personal response to the Lord during this time.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Contemplation by its very nature is an individual exercise and silence is necessary. If you have room it may be helpful to suggest people move so they have their own 'personal space'.



**The Scripture references for the Psalms follow the Hebrew numbering used in many recent Bibles including the Jerusalem Bible but some Bibles use different numbering. If Psalm 23 The Good Shepherd is numbered as Psalm 22 in your Bible, please refer to your church lectionary for all the correct Psalm references for your Bible.*

DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. ²⁷ Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.

²⁸ “If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and work out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. ²⁹ If you don’t, you will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will laugh at you. ³⁰ “This man began to build but can’t finish the job!’ they will say.

³¹ “If a king goes out with 10,000 men to fight another king who comes against him with 20,000 men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. ³² If he isn’t, he will send messengers to meet the other king, to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off. ³³ “In the same way,” concluded Jesus, “none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.”

Other Readings: Wisdom 9:13-18; Psalm 90:3-6, 12-14, 17; Philemon 9-10, 12-17

LECTIO:

Jesus is talking to the crowds around him about the challenges discipleship will bring. Many are following him just because he is a popular teacher. But the disciples also knew that trouble follows close behind Jesus. They were already experiencing a level of persecution from the religious authorities.

In any relationship there comes a time when you must decide whether to get serious about it or not. And that’s exactly what Jesus is talking about today. The Christian life is not for those seeking popularity or a good time with no responsibilities.

As Jesus explains the position it becomes more challenging. Things that seem good can damage our heavenly relationship. Jesus tells us to think again. Nothing must hinder our relationship with him. So Mum and Dad, husband or wife, our children and our own needs and desires must take second place to Jesus’ will. This is how Jesus’ relationship with his beloved father worked.

Shockingly, we have to be willing to surrender our lives to the extent of being crucified in some way. This is painful stuff. Our calling is to do Jesus’ will no matter the suffering or humiliation it brings. Our selfish ways must submit to God’s will. This sort of living touches every area of life and gradually brings it into line with Jesus. And it costs us everything.

For this reason Jesus uses strong and graphic images to make us consider the cost before we start the discipleship journey.

In John 6:43-71 the crowds were horrified by some aspects of Jesus’ teaching and many left him. Jesus makes it clear that humanly speaking it is impossible to follow him. It is only possible by God’s Spirit. And in John 6:65 Jesus says ‘no one can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for him to do so’.

MEDITATIO:

- What impacts you most from reading these verses? Is there a specific aspect of your life that seems at odds with Jesus’ teaching?

ORATIO:

Humbly spend some time with God. Ask him to help you submit everything in your life to him. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength and grace to follow Jesus no matter what the consequences. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 offers us great encouragement:

‘May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being – spirit, soul and body – free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful.’

CONTEMPLATIO:

Think about the example Jesus himself gives us of living a life completely submitted to God. He also knew his father’s total love for him.

Consider the suffering Jesus endured on the cross so that we can live a life free from sin and pleasing to God.

JOY IN HEAVEN

Luke 15:1-10

¹One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, ²the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³So Jesus told them this parable:

⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them – what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it. ⁵When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders ⁶and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbours together and say to them, ‘I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!’ ⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.

⁸“Or suppose a woman who has ten silver coins loses one of them – what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere until she finds it. ⁹When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together, and says to them, ‘I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents.”

This is the shorter form reading. The full Gospel reading continues with the parable of the Lost or Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32. We looked at these verses on the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

*Other Readings: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; Psalm 51:1-2, 10-11, 15, 17;
1 Timothy 1:12-17*

LECTIO:

Once again the ‘authorities’ are outraged. Luke tells us the Jewish religious leaders criticised Jesus for his friendly attitude to ‘sinners’.

Tax collectors topped the ‘sinner list’. They were hated by the Jews because they took money for the pagan occupiers, the Romans. In fact one of Jesus’ own disciples was once a tax collector - Levi, traditionally thought to be Matthew (Mark 2: 13-17).

In Luke 15 Jesus tells the Pharisees three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

The parable of the lost sheep underlines how far the shepherd will go to find just one missing sheep from his flock and his great joy when the lost sheep is found and returned to his care and protection.

The parable of the lost coin reinforces the point. Again, something of value is lost. The woman searches everywhere until she finds it. The fact that she still has nine other coins doesn’t matter. One is lost and must be found.

Both the shepherd and the woman are filled with joy when what was lost is restored to them. Similarly all heaven rejoices when a sinner repents - a broken relationship is restored.

The lost or prodigal son is the third parable. The lost son returns a pauper having frittered his inheritance away. He returns in repentance expecting nothing more than to be his father’s servant. The father has yearned for his son’s return. He runs to greet him with loving open arms. A great celebration is prepared.

The reaction of the elder son brings us right back to the response of the Pharisees. Jesus reaches out to sinners and celebrates when they repent. Jesus warns his listeners, (and us) not to feel self righteous or act as though we are better than others. We must all rely on God’s mercy and forgiveness.

2 MEDITATIO:

- What aspects of these parables strike you most?
- Consider the attitude of the Pharisees compared to the shepherd, the woman and the father in these parables. What can we learn from this?
- Meditate on this verse:

‘This is a true saying, to be completely accepted and believed; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ 1 Timothy 1:15

3 ORATIO:

Use the words of Psalm 51 as a personal prayer. Thank God for his great mercy.

Pray for the ‘lost sheep’ to return to Jesus. The Holy Spirit may bring someone specific to mind as you pray.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the role of the shepherd and the lengths that he will go to look after his sheep. Allow the love of our Great Shepherd to enfold you.

USE YOUR TALENTS WISELY

Luke 16:1-13

¹Jesus said to his disciples, “There was once a rich man who had a servant who managed his property. The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his master’s money, ²so he called him in and said, ‘What is this I hear about you? Hand in a complete account of your handling of my property, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³The servant said to himself, ‘My master is going to dismiss me from my job. What shall I do? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴Now I know what I will do! Then when my job is gone, I shall have friends who will welcome me in their homes.’

⁵“So he called in all the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶‘One hundred barrels of olive oil,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘sit down and write fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another one, ‘And you – how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand sacks of wheat,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘write 800.’

⁸“As a result the master of this dishonest manager praised him for doing such a shrewd thing; because the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light.”

⁹And Jesus went on to say, “And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. ¹⁰Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. ¹¹If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?

¹³“No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a servant will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Other Readings: Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113:1-2, 4-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-8



LECTIO:

This can be a difficult parable to interpret. As with all parables it is important to focus on the main lessons rather than get sidetracked by taking the illustration too far. This passage can be understood on various levels but we will concentrate on two main points.

Jesus encourages us to be faithful stewards of the talents and resources he has entrusted to us especially our money. We should use these gifts wisely or shrewdly. However it would be wrong to conclude that Jesus approves of dishonest means to achieve this, as other passages of Scripture – including today’s reading from Amos – make clear.

The other important point is to keep an eye on who exactly is your master, what or who drives you? Are God’s principles guiding our daily lives or are they being shaped more by TV and the media? Are we truly serving God or really just ourselves? Jesus makes it clear we have to make a choice – no one can serve two masters.



MEDITATIO:

- Consider whether God is your only master or whether you are also trying to serve other masters too. Think about who, or what, influences what you do and think each day.
- Consider how faithful and wise you are being with the resources God has entrusted to you.
- Ask God to show you any ways you could bless others with your time and possessions.



ORATIO:

Use 1 Timothy 2:1-8 as a basis for your prayers today. We are instructed to pray for our leaders and people in authority. Ask God to guide them and help them to use their power wisely. We are also called to pray for freedom to practise our faith. Why not also take this opportunity to pray for those living in countries where it is hard and dangerous to live as a Christian?



CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Amos 8:4-7 and consider God’s heart for the poor and those who are exploited by others. Are there any practical ways you can respond?

CARING FOR THE POOR

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹“There was once a rich man who dressed in the most expensive clothes and lived in great luxury every day. ²⁰There was also a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who used to be brought to the rich man’s door, ²¹hoping to eat the bits of food that fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

²²“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. The rich man died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away, with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴So he called out, ‘Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in this fire!’

²⁵“But Abraham said, ‘Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain. ²⁶Besides all that, there is a deep pit lying between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over to us from where you are.’ ²⁷The rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house, ²⁸where I have five brothers. Let him go and warn them so that they, at least, will not come to this place of pain.’

²⁹“Abraham said, ‘Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; your brothers should listen to what they say.’ ³⁰The rich man answered, ‘That is not enough, father Abraham! But if someone were to rise from death and go to them, then they would turn from their sins.’ ³¹But Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.’”

Other Readings: Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146:6-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16



LECTIO:

Last week we considered what it means to be a good steward of all that God gives us. Luke alone gives us this parable which develops Jesus’ teaching further.

Wealth appears to have made this rich man blind. He had seen Lazarus in a pitiful state outside his luxurious home. He even knew Lazarus’ name (verse 24). But he did absolutely nothing to help him.

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All Jews would know that Moses and the prophets taught that the rich had a social responsibility to care for the poor. In his selfishness this rich man disobeyed God’s law. It is ironic that later, never having lifted a finger to help Lazarus, he asks Abraham to tell Lazarus to help him!

In Hades, family bonds draw out some compassion from the rich man. He thinks of his brothers and asks Abraham to send Lazarus with a warning. He doesn’t want them to end up with the same punishment as him. Abraham responds that they have Moses and the prophets to warn them. This isn’t good enough for the rich man. He believes something more dramatic is needed – only someone rising from the dead will convince his family. Abraham gives a very telling reply, ‘they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death’ (verse 31).

Not long after these words were spoken Jesus himself died and rose from the dead. Abraham’s insight proved accurate both then and now. Even a great miracle will not convince those who ignore the warnings of the Bible. Sadly, many today still refuse to believe in God’s Son Jesus and to serve him as their loving Master.



MEDITATIO:

- What is God revealing to you from this passage? Are you obeying God’s teaching in this area of your life?
- Consider whether you are taking seriously the call to help others in need. This may mean more than just giving money; spending time with someone may be just as precious.
- Compare this reading with the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17-19.



ORATIO:

How is God’s concern for the poor and disadvantaged revealed in Psalm 146? Pray about your own response to this concern and pray for all those working to bring relief to those in need.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Spend some time considering the majesty of God described in 1 Timothy 6:15-16.

FAITH AND ACTIONS

Luke 17:5-10

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Make our faith greater."

⁶The Lord answered, "If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!' and it would obey you."

⁷"Suppose one of you has a servant who is ploughing or looking after the sheep. When he comes in from the field, do you tell him to hurry and eat his meal?"

⁸Of course not! Instead, you say to him, 'Get my supper ready, then put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may have your meal.'

⁹The servant does not deserve thanks for obeying orders, does he? ¹⁰It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty.'

Other Readings: Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14



LECTIO:

Jesus packs a lot of teaching into these few short sentences. There are two themes: the first two verses concern faith and the later verses are about servanthood.

We begin with the disciples asking for faith. It is helpful to put their request in context. In the verses preceding today's Gospel reading the disciples have had a lesson about forgiveness and the consequence of causing someone else to lose faith. Forgiving someone three times was considered honourable according to Jewish tradition at the time. But Jesus calls his disciples to forgive as often as is needed. The disciples realise that following Jesus will demand far more than they are able to give so they ask for more faith.

Jesus replies that what is important is to have a genuine faith in God. It doesn't matter how small this may be; whenever genuine faith is present remarkable things can and do happen.

Jesus then talks about the idea of servanthood. The heart of his teaching is that God deserves our service simply because of who he is. God owes us nothing. We owe him everything. The worldly attitude is to expect a reward for what you do. It's a great temptation to expect God to bless us in some way when we serve him. Jesus makes it clear this attitude is wrong. Taking pleasure in serving him out of gratitude and love is all the reward we need.

To be servants of God means above all to be people of faith. Right attitudes in serving God keep us humble and help guard us against pride.

MEDITATIO:

- Which of these verses speak most clearly to you at this point in your life?
- Do you see yourself as God's servant? Think about the reasons why you serve God. Are you satisfied with serving him out of love and gratitude, or do you look for praise from others?
- Spend a little time with your eyes fixed on the Lord. Let him soften your heart and draw you close to him so that your faith, service and gratitude may grow.

ORATIO:

Prayerfully consider your response to God from this reading and your meditation.

In today's reading from Paul's letter to Timothy, the apostle encourages the young evangelist to keep alive the gift God gave him. This can speak to us too. Ask the Holy Spirit to nurture these precious gifts of power, love and self control, enabling you to live out your life in humble service to God. The Holy Spirit will also help you endure when times are hard.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider this verse from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans:

'So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.' Romans 12:1

ALWAYS BE THANKFUL

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem, he went along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin disease. They stood at a distance ¹³ and shouted, "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us!"

¹⁴ Jesus saw them and said to them, "Go and let the priests examine you."

On the way they were made clean. ¹⁵ When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself to the ground at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus said, "There were ten men who were healed; where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Why is this foreigner the only one who came back to give thanks to God?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Get up and go; your faith has made you well."

Other Readings: 2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 98:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8-13

LECTIO:

In today's Gospel reading Jesus gives us an important lesson in being thankful for God's blessings.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to face his crucifixion and resurrection. Standing at a distance on the outskirts of a village ten men with a dreaded skin disease cry out to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us!' (verse 13).

The plight of people suffering from leprosy and other skin diseases in Jesus' day was very harsh indeed. They were forced to leave their family and friends and live in exile away from the rest of the community. They had to fend for themselves alongside others in the same condition.

They were cut off from the religious life of the community and considered 'spiritually unclean'. Some even believed that their disease was a punishment from God. Their situation was miserable, their prospects were bleak and there was little hope. The only way back to a normal life was if the skin disease cleared up and the priests certified it.

No wonder these men cried to Jesus for help. Jesus simply tells them to let the priests examine them. They all obey Jesus' instructions and on the way to the priests the miracle takes place. All ten are healed.

As soon as one of the group discovers he has been healed he rushes back to thank Jesus and give praise to God. Did he talk to the other nine before returning? We are not told. But we are told that this man was a Samaritan.

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The other nine were presumably all Jewish. Jesus was a Jewish teacher. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans and regarded them as religious heretics. The very person they would have least expected to show his gratitude is in fact the only one who gives thanks to God.

Jesus' final words to the Samaritan are significant. The word translated 'Get up' has several meanings; early Christians would have understood a reference to resurrection or new life. Ten lepers were healed but only the Samaritan is told his faith has made him well. Perhaps Jesus is referring to spiritual as well as physical healing.

MEDITATIO:

- How does this passage speak to you?
- Why do you think the nine that were also healed didn't return to thank Jesus? Have you ever received an answer to prayer but forgot to thank God before doing anything else?
- How can we avoid taking God's blessings for granted? Is there a danger that we can sometimes feel we 'deserve' God's blessing because of something we have done?

ORATIO:

Think about all the ways God has been good to you. Write them down and read your list through each day this week. Respond to God with thanks and praise. The Holy Spirit may well remind you of more things as the week progresses. Ask God to help you to always be grateful for all he has done in your life.

Choose a Psalm each day this week to help you express your praise to God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider these verses from Philippians 4:4, 6-7:

'May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice! Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.'

DON'T GIVE UP

Luke 18:1-8

¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged. ² “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. ³ And there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her rights, saying, ‘Help me against my opponent!’ ⁴ For a long time the judge refused to act, but at last he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, ⁵ yet because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don’t, she will keep on coming and finally wear me out!’”

⁶ And the Lord continued, “Listen to what that corrupt judge said. ⁷ Now, will God not judge in favour of his own people who cry to him day and night for help? Will he be slow to help them? ⁸ I tell you, he will judge in their favour and do it quickly. But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”

Other Readings: Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 121; 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2

LECTIO:

Jesus is a master at making complex ideas clear. Here he uses a simple story to explain the importance of perseverance, which he links to prayer.

The widow who appeals to the judge is seeking justice. She simply wants him to uphold her rights so her opponent complies with the law. But for some reason the judge keeps refusing to hear her case.

Eventually the judge gives in, not because it is the right thing to do, but because he realises this woman just won’t give up. He can’t face the thought of her coming to him time after time so he concedes and judges in her favour.

Jesus then contrasts the behaviour of the corrupt judge with God. The differences are so great it is like comparing black and white. Jesus assures us that God will judge in favour of his people and he will do it swiftly. Why? Because God is good and just. So we needn’t fear asking for God’s help because he will surely answer (first half of verse 8).

In the second half of verse 8 Jesus asks another question: ‘But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?’ What does this have to do with persistence in prayer?

Perhaps Jesus is saying that persevering prayer is sustained by faith. If you believe God loves you then you don’t stop praying, even if God does not answer immediately.

More importantly, Jesus implies that his return may be longer than some expect. So there is a link with persistence and endurance especially for the faithful who pray.

Persistent prayer encourages a faithful hope and that is where Jesus started his parable. It links to the verses in Luke 21:34-36 about remaining watchful in prayer because no one knows the time when Jesus will return. And this was just as true for the disciples as it is for us today.

MEDITATIO:

- Think of times when you have had to wait a long time for God’s answer to your prayers. What encouraged you to keep persevering and not give up?
- Why do you think God doesn’t always answer our prayers immediately or sometimes says ‘no’?
- Consider the parallel between this passage and Matt 7:7-11 which also teaches about persistence in prayer: ‘Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!’

ORATIO:

Psalm 121:2 reminds us that, ‘My help will come from the Lord who made heaven and earth.’

Why not bring the things that concern you to God again in prayer today? Ask for his help not to give up as you wait to see his response. Give thanks that the all powerful creator of the universe will not fail us.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4.2, particularly verses 16-17 below. What do they mean to you?

‘All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.’

STAYING RIGHT WITH GOD

Luke 18:9-14

⁹Jesus also told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. ¹⁰“Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

¹¹“The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed, ‘I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. ¹²I fast two days a week, and I give you a tenth of all my income.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his face to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, ‘God, have pity on me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you,” said Jesus, “the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For all who make themselves great will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be made great.”

Other Readings: Ecclesiasticus 35:12-14, 16-19; Psalm 34:1-2, 16-18, 22; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

LECTIO:

Jesus told this parable originally ‘to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else’ (verse 9). That is the key to understanding this passage.

Much of Jesus’ teaching in Luke’s Gospel opens the doors of the Kingdom of God to let in sinners who are willing to repent. By contrast the Pharisees seem set on keeping sinners out.

Jesus uses the behaviour of the Pharisee and the tax collector to make his point clear. For the people gathered around Jesus the characteristics of the two personalities he is using are well known.

The Pharisees are considered the ‘professionals’ when it comes to prayer. What they didn’t know about religious law and how to observe it wasn’t really worth knowing. They are officially ‘good’.

But the tax collector is assumed to be corrupt – what else could he be since he was colluding with the pagan Romans occupying their country? Tax collectors were the puppets of the Roman authorities; they collected taxes from their own people and made themselves rich in the process by taking far more tax than they should.

As the parable unfolds Jesus’ purpose in using these two characters becomes clearer. The Pharisee prays in a proud boastful way, only seeing what he does right and others do wrong. He forgets to confess his sins. The tax collector does the opposite. He knows he needs God’s forgiveness, and in acknowledging his sinfulness before God he is ready and able to receive God’s forgiveness and grace. The Pharisee is not and so does not receive God’s grace.

We are challenged in the same way. Every single person has sinned and each one needs God’s forgiveness.

The Pharisees actually sought to bring a religious renewal among the Jews of Jesus’s own time. Sadly they failed to accept Jesus’ message. They did not see him as the one sent by God to save humanity. They opposed Jesus, seeing him as an impostor, and refused to believe in him.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider the reasons why God hates sin.
- What is your attitude to sin in your own life? Do you take it seriously and seek forgiveness? Or do you excuse it, or compare yourself with others and think you are better than them?
- Consider 1 John 1:8-9:
 - ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.’
- Do you ask for pardon for your sins? Catholics know that they can confess their sins to their priest and receive forgiveness from God.
- We can easily fall into the trap of judging others who fall short of our own standards. Why is this dangerous? How can we avoid it? What attitude should we have?

ORATIO:

Reflect on today’s Gospel reading. Let God reveal any areas of sin that you need to put right. Consider whether you have taken God’s forgiveness for granted. Give thanks for God’s mercy and acknowledge your dependence on him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Use Psalms 34 and 51 to enrich your time with God today. Consider his great faithfulness and mercy.

TRUE HAPPINESS

Matthew 5:1-12

¹Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered round him, ²and he began to teach them:

³“Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor;
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

⁴Happy are those who mourn;
God will comfort them!

⁵Happy are those who are humble;
they will receive what God has promised!

⁶Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires;
God will satisfy them fully!

⁷Happy are those who are merciful to others;
God will be merciful to them!

⁸Happy are the pure in heart;
they will see God!

⁹Happy are those who work for peace;
God will call them his children!

¹⁰Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires;
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

¹¹“Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.

Other Readings: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24:1-6; 1 John 3:1-3



LECTIO:

Matthew's Gospel is structured around five major teachings of Jesus, mainly to his disciples. The first of these is centred on what is often called the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes.

The radical differences between the 'kingdom of heaven' – Jesus' rule as Lord and King being established on earth - and the earthly kingdom lie at the heart of this sermon.

Jesus sums up the lifestyle and attitudes that bring true happiness, or blessing, in nine statements. These are very different from what the world would say brings happiness. In fact you could almost say the happiness described above is the direct opposite of what people in the world think makes them happy.

In some translations the word 'blessed' is used instead of happiness. Another translation could be 'contented'. There is a contentment or fulfilment that comes from following and serving God rather than just pleasing ourselves.

This short list of nine beatitudes sums up the core values of gospel living. Some are also listed in the Old Testament but Jesus draws all the threads together to provide us with an excellent reference point to guide our lives. The focus is always on our relationship with God and with others. The saints known and unknown learned this, so can we. True happiness will only be found living out these Beatitudes.



MEDITATIO:

- Which of the Beatitudes stands out for you the most?
- Which do you find most challenging? Consider how you might put more of Jesus' teaching into practice in the coming weeks.
- Look back to the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (14th February) when we considered Luke's account of this teaching. What strikes you when you compare these two accounts?



ORATIO:

Read these Beatitudes through slowly several times. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Make a note of what you feel God is saying to you through this teaching. Ask God to help you in the areas where you feel particularly weak.

Read Psalm 24:1-6. Use these verses during your time of prayer today.



CONTEMPLATIO:

'Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children;' 1 John 3:1 *Jerusalem Bible*

Reflect on the depth of God's love for you that this verse reveals. Make your own response to God.

RESURRECTION HOPE

Luke 20:27-38

²⁷ Then some Sadducees, who say that people will not rise from death, came to Jesus and said, ²⁸“Teacher, Moses wrote this law for us: ‘If a man dies and leaves a wife but no children, that man’s brother must marry the widow so that they can have children who will be considered the dead man’s children.’ ²⁹ Once there were seven brothers; the eldest got married and died without having children. ³⁰ Then the second one married the woman, ³¹ and then the third. The same thing happened to all seven – they died without having children. ³² Last of all, the woman died. ³³ Now, on the day when the dead rise to life, whose wife will she be? All seven of them had married her.”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “The men and women of this age marry, ³⁵ but the men and women who are worthy to rise from death and live in the age to come will not then marry. ³⁶ They will be like angels and cannot die. They are the children of God, because they have risen from death. ³⁷ And Moses clearly proves that the dead are raised to life. In the passage about the burning bush he speaks of the Lord as ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ ³⁸ He is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive.”

*Other Readings: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15;
2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5*



LECTIO:

We begin with the Sadducees. They were an influential religious group when Jesus was on earth. Their power stemmed from being in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem. They based their religious life and faith on just the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, which sets out the Law.

They didn’t believe in bodily resurrection, which Jesus and the Pharisees upheld (Acts 23:6-9). So to try and prove their point they put this absurd question to Jesus. It is based on the ‘Levirate Law’ (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). If a husband died without an heir his brother was required to marry the widow to protect family property.

Jesus replies that resurrection life will not be the same as the life we live today. Those ‘who are worthy to rise from death’ will be like angels and will live forever (verses 34-36). So there will be no need for marriage or for children to continue the family line.

We are not given many details about our resurrection body. We do know that the disciples recognised Jesus after his resurrection, even if others like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn’t recognise him immediately (Luke 24:13-35).

Jesus concludes his argument by quoting from a book that the Sadducees accepted as authoritative, Exodus. He cites Moses as proof that the dead are raised to life. When God speaks to Moses from the burning bush he reveals himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:6).

The patriarchs are presented as alive. First century Jews would have understood that the patriarchs hadn’t yet literally risen from the dead but ‘lived’ with God awaiting their final resurrection. God is the God of the living not of the dead.



MEDITATIO:

- Resurrection is a cornerstone of Christian faith. If Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead then we would have no foundation to hope that there is life after death. Are you confident in this hope? Read the apostle Paul’s argument for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.



ORATIO:

Pray these verses from 2 Thessalonians and bring any fears to God:

‘May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us unfailing courage and a firm hope, encourage you and strengthen you always to do good and say what is good.

May the Lord lead you into a greater understanding of God’s love and the endurance that is given by Christ.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, 3:5



CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider this encouragement from Philippians 3:20-21:

‘We, however, are citizens of heaven, we eagerly wait for the coming of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule.’

STAND FIRM

Luke 21:5-19

⁵ Some of the disciples were talking about the Temple, how beautiful it looked with its fine stones and the gifts offered to God. Jesus said, ⁶ “All this you see – the time will come when not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one will be thrown down.”

⁷ “Teacher,” they asked, “when will this be? And what will happen in order to show that the time has come for it to take place?”

⁸ Jesus said, “Be on guard; don’t be deceived. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time has come!’ But don’t follow them.

⁹ Don’t be afraid when you hear of wars and revolutions; such things must happen first, but they do not mean that the end is near.”

¹⁰ He went on to say, “Countries will fight each other; kingdoms will attack one another. ¹¹ There will be terrible earthquakes, famines, and plagues everywhere; there will be strange and terrifying things coming from the sky. ¹² Before all these things take place, however, you will be arrested and persecuted; you will be handed over to be tried in synagogues and be put in prison; you will be brought before kings and rulers for my sake. ¹³ This will be your chance to tell the Good News. ¹⁴ Make up your minds beforehand not to worry about how you will defend yourselves, ¹⁵ because I will give you such words and wisdom that none of your enemies will be able to refute or contradict what you say. ¹⁶ You will be handed over by your parents, your brothers, your relatives, and your friends; and some of you will be put to death. ¹⁷ Everyone will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a single hair from your heads will be lost. ¹⁹ Stand firm, and you will save yourselves.

Other Readings: Malachi 3:19-20; Psalm 98:5-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12



LECTIO:

This is Luke’s version of Jesus’ end of the world, or apocalyptic, teaching. We find similar passages in Matthew and Mark. But each writer emphasises different aspects of Jesus’ teaching according to the needs of their particular community.

Luke writes to those living away from Palestine. It was a time of war with Rome. Luke probably wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. This part of Jesus’ prophetic words would therefore already have been fulfilled when the early Christians read Luke’s account.

In addition to prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the persecution of the early Christian church, Jesus also makes a link to the end of the world (verses 10-11, 25-36). So his warnings remain equally important for us today – when persecution comes because of our faith, don’t be surprised. Jesus has warned us in advance, persecution is to be expected.

And if persecution comes knocking at our door we need to stand firm. We must endure, remain patient and stand firm. God is still with us even if family or friends reject or betray us.

Luke knew about the reality of persecution. By the time he wrote his Gospel Peter and Paul had been killed as had many other Christians.

Jesus’ words are a reminder that persecution happens and takes many forms. It is a practical fact in many parts of the world today. Some Christians are driven from their homes, their jobs and some lose their lives. The message is still the same: stand firm. God loves you and will not abandon you.



MEDITATIO:

- What types of persecution have you experienced because of your faith?
- Perhaps you have been insulted, embarrassed or ridiculed. How do you react in these situations? What did you say or do? How did you bear witness to Jesus?



ORATIO:

Pray that God will give you the courage and strength to stand firm in the face of any persecution that might come your way so that you bear a good witness to God.

Pray for Christians living in countries where persecution is severe. Pray for those who are in prison because of their faith or who have been rejected by their families.



CONTEMPLATIO:

‘... sing together with joy before the Lord, because he comes to rule the earth. He will rule the peoples of the world with justice and fairness.’
Psalm 98:8b-9

Read the rest of Psalm 98 and spend some time reflecting on God’s mighty power and justice.

THE HEAVENLY KING

Luke 23:35-43

³⁵ The people stood there watching while the Jewish leaders jeered at him: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah whom God has chosen!”

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him: they came up to him and offered him cheap wine, ³⁷ and said, “Save yourself if you are the king of the Jews!”

³⁸ Above him were written these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you fear God? You received the same sentence he did. ⁴¹ Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong.” ⁴² And he said to Jesus, “Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!”

⁴³ Jesus said to him, “I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.”

Other Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-5; Colossians 1:12-20

LECTIO:

We stand before the cross today. Jesus is dying in agony alongside two criminals. The leaders are jeering and mocking him for claiming to be the Messiah but not being able to even save himself! The Roman soldiers are also pouring scorn on this so-called ‘King of the Jews’.

In marked contrast Luke provides us with a fascinating conversation between Jesus and one of the criminals. He is the only Gospel writer to record this life changing exchange.

One of the criminals joins the taunts ridiculing Jesus’ Messianic claim. The other criminal rebukes him. He recognises two vital things. Firstly, something the Jewish leaders failed to see, that Jesus ‘has done no wrong’ (verse 41), he is innocent and doesn’t deserve this punishment. Secondly, something the disciples were desperately hoping was true, that this wasn’t the end, Jesus would be returning and when he did it would be as King (verse 42).

The God-fearing criminal accepted he deserved to be punished for his actions, expressed faith in Jesus and threw himself on God’s mercy, knowing this was his only hope. Jesus responds as he always does to genuine faith and cries for mercy, with the gift of salvation.

MEDITATIO:

- Pause at the foot of the cross. Acknowledge your sinfulness. Rejoice that the grace of God is available to redeem sinners like us.
- How did you recognise Jesus as your Saviour? Were you given a blinding moment of grace when you knew the truth like the criminal? Or has your understanding been a gradual process bringing you to faith over months or years?
- Think ahead to when Jesus will return in power and glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Meditate on this glorious hope.

ORATIO:

Spend some time giving thanks because Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross. We too can receive forgiveness and inherit eternal life, and all by God’s gracious gift; we can do nothing to deserve or earn it.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider your wonderful Saviour as revealed in Colossians 1:15-20. Read these verses several times and let them minister to your soul.

¹⁵ ‘Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the firstborn Son, superior to all created things. ¹⁶ For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him. ¹⁷ Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place. ¹⁸ He is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body’s life. He is the firstborn Son, who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have the first place in all things. ¹⁹ For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. ²⁰ Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.’